

Frequently asked Questions about Bulimia Nervosa



It has been many years since I had bulimia. But I do still think about it—and how I can try to keep my daughter, Jess, from getting it. Bulimia is a lot more than trying to be skinny. There are so many things that cause an eating disorder. But, as her mom, I feel like I can be a good role model. I try my best not to talk about weight loss and body shape in front of her. But it's still all around her—her friends talk about how they look—and how fat they think they are. She's surrounded by images of thin girls on TV and in magazines. So I tell her that she is important for who she is, not what she looks like—that a thin body doesn't mean she'll be happier or more popular. I want Jess to feel good about herself and have a healthy attitude as she grows up. It's not easy, but I feel like I can make a difference.

What is bulimia nervosa?

Bulimia (buh-LEE -me-ah) nervosa is a type of eating disorder. Someone with bulimia eats a lot of food in a short amount of time (bingeing) and then tries to get rid of the calories by purging. Purging might be done in these ways:

- making oneself throw up
- taking laxatives (pills or liquids that increase how fast food moves through your body and leads to a bowel movement [BM])

A person with bulimia may also use these ways to prevent weight gain:

- exercising a lot (more than normal)
- restricting her eating or not eating at all (like going without food for a day)
- taking diuretics (pills that make you urinate [pee])

What causes it?

Bulimia is more than just a problem with food. It's a way of using food to feel in control of other feelings that may seem overwhelming. Purging and other behaviors to prevent weight gain are ways for people with bulimia to feel more in control of their lives and to ease stress and anxiety. While there is no single known cause of bulimia, many things may have a role in its development:

- **Families.** The attitude of parents about appearance and diet affects their kids. Also, if your mother or sister has bulimia, you are more likely to have it.
- **Culture.** The U.S. has a social and cultural ideal of extreme thinness. Women partially define themselves on how they look.
- **Personal characteristics.** Someone with bulimia may feel badly about herself, feel helpless, and hate the way she looks.
- **Other emotional disorders.** Other mental health problems, like depression or anxiety, occur along with bulimia.
- **Stressful events or life changes.** Things like starting a new school or job, being teased, or traumatic events like rape can lead to the onset of bulimia.
- **Biology.** There are studies being done to look at many genes, hormones, and chemicals in the brain that may have an effect on the development of, and recovery from, bulimia.

What are signs of bulimia nervosa?

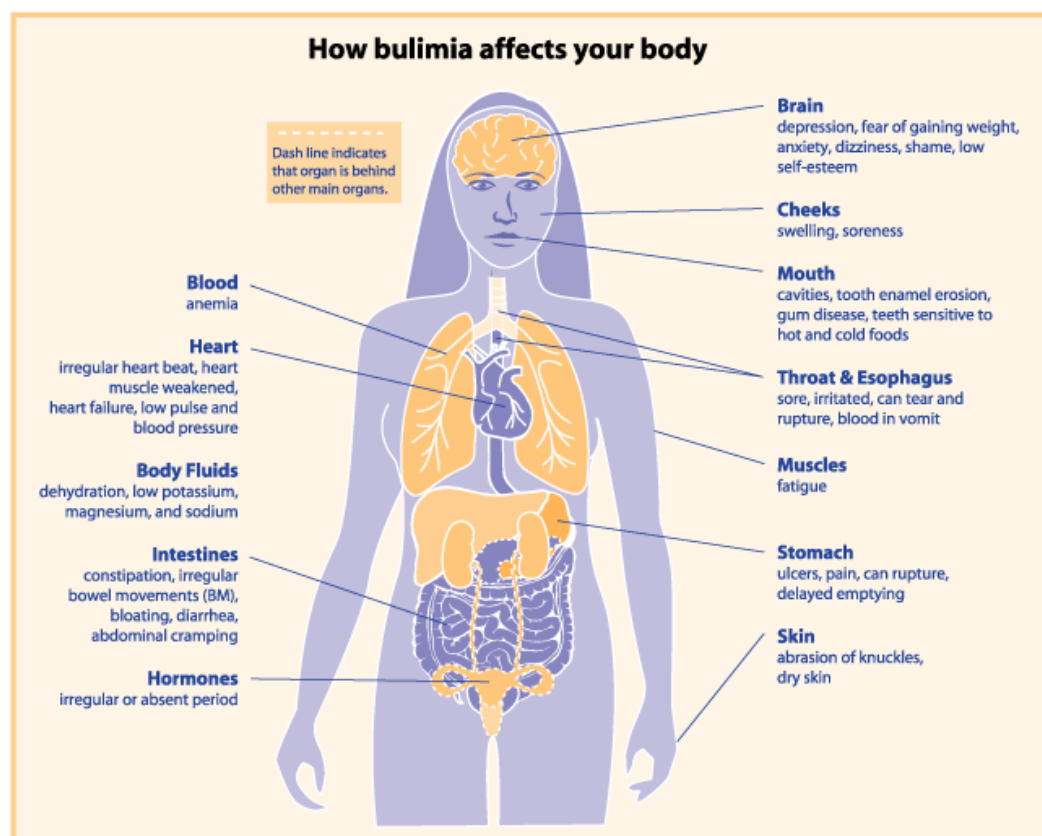
Unlike anorexia, when people are severely underweight, people with bulimia may be underweight, overweight, or have a normal weight. This makes it harder to know if someone has this disease. However, someone with bulimia may have these signs:

- thinks about food a lot
- binges (normally in secret)
- throws up after bingeing
- uses laxatives, diet pills, or diuretics (pills that help you pee) to control weight
- is depressed
- is unhappy and/or thinks a lot about her body shape and weight
- eats large amounts of food quickly
- goes to the bathroom all the time after she eats (to throw up)
- exercises a lot, even during bad weather, fatigue, illness, or injury

- unusual swelling of the cheeks or jaw area
- cuts and calluses on the back of the hands and knuckles from making herself throw up
- white enamel of teeth wears away making teeth look clear
- doesn't see friends or participate in activities as much
- has rules about food—has “good” foods and “bad” foods

What happens to someone who has bulimia?

Bulimia can be very harmful to the body. Look at the picture to find out how bulimia affects your health.



Can someone with bulimia get better?

Yes, a person with bulimia can get better. Different types of therapy have worked to help people with bulimia. This may include individual, group, and family therapy. The antidepressant medicine, Prozac, can be used to treat this illness and is usually given in combination with therapy.

Can women who had bulimia nervosa in the past still get pregnant?

Bulimia can cause an irregular or absent period. But researchers don't think this affects a woman's chances of getting pregnant after she recovers.

Does bulimia nervosa hurt a baby when the mother is pregnant?

If a pregnant woman with bulimia gets pregnant, it may be possible that the baby and mother will have these problems:

- miscarriage
- high blood pressure (in the mother)
- stillbirth (baby not born alive)
- low birth weight
- low Apgar score (tests done after birth to make sure the baby is healthy)
- breech delivery (baby tries to come out with feet or buttocks first)
- birth by C-section
- premature birth
- post partum depression

For more information...

You can find out more about bulimia by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) at 800-994-WOMAN or the following organizations.

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), NIH, HHS

Phone: (866) 615-6464

Internet Address: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Mental Health Information Center, SAMHSA, HHS

Phone: (800) 789-2647

Internet Address: <http://www.mentalhealth.org>

Academy for Eating Disorders (AED)

Phone: (703) 556-9222

Internet Address: <http://www.aedweb.org>

Eating Disorder Referral and Information Center

Phone: (858) 792-7463

Internet Address: <http://www.edreferral.com>

The National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC)

A Project of the Office on Women's Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Harvard Eating Disorders Center (HEDC)

Phone: (617) 236-7766

Internet Address: <http://www.hedc.org>

National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)

Phone: (800) 931-2237

Internet Address: <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

This FAQ was reviewed by Barbara E. Wolfe, PhD, RN, CS, FAAN, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School.

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